

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

**Maria del Mar Narbona Logroño, Paulo G. Pinto, John Tofik Karam, eds.** *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. Illustrations. 356 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4773-1218-6.

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**Published on** H-Caribbean (June, 2018)

**Commissioned by** Gregg French

The historical role of Islam in the Western Hemisphere has long been under-analyzed, and in the past two decades also actively obscured or rewritten by the War on Terror and its malign political outgrowths. The statistically small number of adherents to Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean basin, and Latino USA means that scholars have been far more inclined to examine Christian and indigenous religious identities as they intersect with class, race, and gender in these regions. The twelve essays in *Crescent over Another Horizon* function as something of a corrective, reinserting the Islamic world into the Americas and the Americas into the Islamic world. As the editors note in their introduction, Islam's crescent "inhabits a far more expansive horizon than has been heretofore examined." With this in mind, the volume brings together "Iberian colonists, enslaved Africans, indentured South Asians, migrant Arabs, [and] Latino and Latin American converts" in its wide-ranging investigation of the "global breadth of Islam and its plural configuration in the making of these Americas" (p. 2). The editors helpfully sketch out the collection's methodological concerns, acknowledging the utility of area studies while actively trying to avoid their overly determined and needlessly bounded tendencies. As in many works with transnational/intercultural emphases, useful analytical containers (nations, religions, ethnicities) are balanced with acknowledgments of fluidity and exchange. The reader is reminded that even the relationship between Muslim identity and ethnicity has shifted over time, as migratory waves and conversion deepened hybrid cultural formations within the hemispheric *ummah* (religious community). The introductory chapter con-

cludes by considering the place of "Moorish" heritage in Latin American imaginaries, reminding us that the heterodox ways of living and practicing Islam explored in the volume have long been present in regional histories.

The first three chapters ask us to "reconsider" history in their explorations of Moriscos in the Americas, African Muslims in the slave trade, and South Asian Hindustani communities in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Suriname. Karoline P. Cook uses legal records to illustrate the latent anxieties of Spain's attempt to construct a Catholic empire in the Americas, detailing paranoia surrounding "hidden" Moriscos in colonized territories. Attempts by Spanish authorities to completely restrict Morisco overseas migration led to cultures of denunciation where racialized arguments over descent determined shifting boundaries of loyalty and status. The largest group of Muslims in the colonized Americas were, of course, enslaved Africans. John Tofik Karam surveys how Islam functioned as a tool of refuge and rebellion within shifting intra-/inter-imperial dynamics. At certain times favored (Mande speakers in the British Empire) or at other times reviled (in late colonial Brazil), African Muslims used religion as a means to negotiate the ebb and flow of various empires in the New World. Serving as a bridge to the contemporary studies that populate the remainder of the collection, Ellen Bal and Kathinka Sinha-Kerkhoff analyze the experiences of Muslim Hindustanis in Suriname. Although tensions over the ritual sacrifice of livestock (*kurbani*) surfaced during the interwar period, religious differences were "a less powerful unifier than class, language, customs, culinary traditions,

and shared historical experiences” for Muslim and Hindu Hindustanis (p. 73).

The second section examines the “contemporary cartographies” of Islam in Latin America. Each chapter is a national case study, examining identity formation, conversion narratives, sociopolitical challenges, and a host of other issues related to Latin American/Caribbean Muslims. Silvia Montenegro contrasts the trajectories of Sunni and Shi’a institutions in Argentina, illustrating how the former, grounded in migrant histories, developed patrimonial relations with the state, while the latter solidified their identities through transnational/transcultural circulations with Iran, with a grounding in religious professionalization and specialization. Paulo G. Pinto likewise compares different sites of Islamic practice in his study of Brazilian communities. Using Rio de Janeiro, Curitiba, and Foz do Iguaçu as his anchor points, Pinto demonstrates the significant variances in approaches to Islam. Rio’s Muslim community, for instance, sustains itself on participation in religious diversity and tolerance movements, with a focus on conversion, while in Foz do Iguaçu Islamic practice is grounded in the adaptation and reinvention of Middle Eastern traditions among a predominantly Arab population. Camila Pastor de Maria y Campos considers what Islam provides for Mexican converts in her contribution. “The role that conversion plays in different contexts enables converts to mark a critical distance vis-à-vis their own society and articulates the conflictive relationship they have with its norms,” she writes (p. 155). In other words, the cosmopolitan character of Islam and its recasting as a theology of liberation allows lower- and middle-class Mexicans to sidestep subalternity. Moving into geopolitical realms, Luis Mesa Delmonte historicizes the growth of Islam in contemporary Cuba by linking it to the “special period” of the early 1990s, when the Cuban state liberalized religious practice and deepened diplomatic ties with Muslim countries. In Martinique, according to Liliane Kuczynski, the universality of Islam has been unable to bridge divides between those who follow syncretic West African marabout teachers and newer arrivals trained in Saudia Arabian Sunni orthodoxies. “The traditionally emphasized capacity of Islam to teach across languages, cultures, and peoples does not yet seem sufficient to bring unity to this group,” Kuczynski concludes (p. 221). The final chapter in the section by Halima-Sacadia Kassim provides a thorough study of the social media habits of Muslim university students in Trinidad. Websites like Facebook, she argues, contribute another layer in the formation of religious identity for

these students, who adjust their profiles to reflect their “real selves” as “informed and mediated by Islam” (p. 248).

The last section, which shifts to Latina/o-Islamic intersections in the United States, begins with Hjamil A. Martínez-Vázquez’s fascinating analysis of conversion narratives and historical memory. The chapter is wide ranging, touching on the alienations from friends/family Latina/o converts face to the modes by which they make sense of their hybrid identities. In a contribution that ties the chapter to the multivalent historical concerns of the volume, Martínez-Vázquez demonstrates how Latina/o converts “dis-cover [sic] the Islamic tradition embedded with *latinidad*” through Spain’s Moorish heritage (p. 270). In this telling, Islam’s role in peninsular history connects it to the ur-narrative of Latina/o identity, reconciling two seemingly disparate sites within the convert. Using the José Padilla case as his backdrop, Mirsad Krijestorac focuses on the Muslim American population of South Florida. He examines two Miami-area mosques in particular, one with roots in the Nation of Islam and the other founded by South Asian immigrants. Contrary to alarmist claims of Hispanic Islamization in the wake of Padilla’s arrest, Krijestorac finds, Muslim populations in South Florida are “disconnected” from Hispanic communities, the former increasingly looking inward along ethnic and sectarian lines (partially as an outgrowth of successive state and media interventions in the post-9/11 era). The volume’s concluding chapter by Yesenia King and Michael P. Perez argues that Latina converts in the United States use Islam as a tool of empowerment to enable “flexible negotiation of their identities” (p. 321). Their “hybridized Latina/o and Islamic sensibilities” allow them to deal with the double-edged marginality of being women of color in the United States and Latinas within an Islamic American world dominated by Arabs and South Asians (p. 322).

*Crescent over Another Horizon* counteracts the tendency to locate Islam in the othered spaces of a nebulously constructed “east”—a research orientation that binds the religion along the long arc that runs from the Middle East, through the Indian Ocean world, and into maritime Southeast Asia. While these spaces undoubtedly serve as heartlands for diffuse Islamic orthodoxies and hybridities, their prominence in the literature can obscure more demographically limited (yet still crucial) diffusions of the faith. As the collection attests, Islam is not new to the Americas. Interactions with Mediterranean, West African, Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Southeast Asian Islamic traditions animate these es-

says, as do the interactivities within the Latin America/Caribbean/Latino USA *ummah*. Although the book operates across multiple scales and temporalities, its constituent parts mostly succeed in conveying Islam's dynamism in the regions under study.

Each essay works within the larger themes of the volume but could also serve as a departure point for more granular study. The pieces by Cook and Karam will be especially valuable for historians of race, empire, and religion in the Atlantic world, building as they do on work by Sylviane Diouf, Paul Lovejoy, and others. The first section could have been expanded, as we are only given around sixty pages to cover four centuries of history. The character of Islamic practice in individual Latin American slave societies, for instance, would have provided an important bridge to the case studies that populate part 2, "Contemporary Cartographies." Likewise, what do we make of the intra-imperial links between Mexico (pre- and post-independence) and Islamic Southeast Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? The re-

lationship between Spain, Islam, and Latin America extended beyond the Atlantic world. Karam's essay illustrates the value of using empire as an analytical tool to track cultural currents. In the second section, readers of H-Caribbean with contemporary research interests will find the essays on Trinidad, Martinique, and Cuba especially welcome. Islam in these national contexts is woefully understudied and each piece takes a novel approach to the topic.

The collection includes contributions from researchers operating across the humanities and social sciences, and thus has real interdisciplinary value. There is something to recommend here for scholars studying a host of topics: the Atlantic slave trade, identity and ethnicity in the Americas, the global history of Islam, the experiences and impact of Muslims in Latin American societies, and the inadvertent role of European empires in growing the *ummah*. Additionally, the volume would be useful for graduate seminars on Islamic or Latin American subjects.

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**Citation:** Oliver Charbonneau. Review of del Mar Narbona Logroño, Maria; Pinto, Paulo G.; Karam, John Tofik, eds., *Crescent over Another Horizon: Islam in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Latino USA*. H-Caribbean, H-Net Reviews. June, 2018.

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